



Immediate Release

Indiana Leading the Way for Family Engagement of Incarcerated Youth

Indianapolis, IN (September 10, 2013) – The Indiana Department of Correction’s (IDOC) Division of Youth Services (DYS) is working to engage families of youth in the criminal justice system through the Family Youth Initiative. The Family Youth Initiative is a program started by the Vera Institute of Justice and Performance-based Standards (PbS) Learning Institute to develop national standards for family engagement in the juvenile justice system.

Last year, Indiana was one of two states chosen to pilot family surveys as part of the Family Youth Initiative to measure the experiences of families regarding access to their children and information about their treatment. Based on the outcome of these surveys, DYS increased opportunities for families to connect with youth by opening up visitation hours and lifting restrictions on the number of visits allowed at all state juvenile correctional facilities. Facility staff have also been working with parents and guardians to integrate them into the treatment and re-entry process through phone conferences and family councils. So far these changes have led to improved communication between the facility and parents and better behavior and performance by the youth. Indiana is also partnering with Vera to conduct a research project on the impact of family engagement initiatives on recidivism.

“By involving parents in the treatment process and bringing them into the correctional environment, we can improve reintegration planning and long-term outcomes for youth when they are released back to the community. Regardless of the nature of a child’s relationship with his parents, it is clear that we need to actively nurture and help support that relationship” stated Executive Director of DYS Michael Dempsey.

As an innovative approach to improving family engagement, IDOC is teaming up with correctional services provider JPay to help keep youth connected to their family through video visitation. Beginning in November, JPay will be providing video visitation service at all IDOC juvenile facilities at no cost to the facilities, students or their families. JPay currently provides these services at the Pendleton and Madison Juvenile Correctional Facilities at a minimal cost to parents. JPay is in the process of developing a mobile application that parents and families can use to connect with their child on their smart phones and other portable devices. They hope to have the app out by the first of the year.

The IDOC also has future plans to provide iPads for counselors at each of its juvenile facilities. The iPads will be used for video visitation, family sessions, treatment team meetings, parent/teacher meetings, mental health and medical updates, etc.

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